

**Domestic Violence in the
Lives of Orange County Children:
A Preliminary Description of
Orange County Superior Court's
Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project**

A Collaborative Research Project Between

Orange County Superior Court's
Mediation and Investigative Services
and
Judicial Council of California
Administrative Office of the Courts
Statewide Office of Family Court Services

Submitted to
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The opinions, findings, and conclusions in this report are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Administrative Office of the Courts or the California Judicial Council.

According to reports by counties at the California Judicial Council's 1996 Conference on Family Violence and the Courts (*State Court Outlook: California Courts in Crisis, 1996*), the number of family violence cases filed in the state courts has escalated significantly. The *1996 Client Baseline Snapshot Study* by the California Statewide Office of Family Court Services' Uniform Statistical Reporting System, also identified domestic violence as a factor in a high proportion of cases seen in family court each year. According to this study, at least one parent in 62 percent of all families had alleged that there had been at least one episode of domestic violence in his or her relationship with the other parent. Intraparental violence was reported to have occurred within the year prior to the survey in 23 percent of all families. Also, at least one parent in 56 percent of the families surveyed reported that a temporary restraining order was in place. Twenty-nine percent of the parents said that police had been involved. Eleven percent of parents reported seeking medical attention after a violent incident.

Equally as disturbing as these statistics are, at least one parent in nearly half of all families seen in family court mediation in 1996 reported that a child had witnessed violence between his or her parents. Given that nearly 100,000 children are the subject of child custody mediations every year in California, it can be concluded that almost 50,000 of these California children are exposed to domestic violence each year. In 5 percent of these families, parents conceded that their children had been injured during an incident of violence. In the 1993 survey conducted by the Statewide Office of Family Court Services, 30 percent of the families reporting with a history of domestic violence also indicated that Children's Protective Services had conducted an investigation (*Report 6: Future Directions for Mandatory Child Custody*

Mediation Services: Considerations From Two Statewide Representative Studies of Court Users, 1996).

Recognizing the problem of family violence and concerned for the safety of victims, some courts have established specialized departments to handle domestic violence. This report describes one county's response to this crisis.

**Orange County Superior Court's
Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project**

The Orange County Superior Court's Family Law Panel, under the leadership of Supervising Family Law Judge Jonathan H. Cannon, implemented the Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project in August 1997. This pilot project provides for the special handling of civil domestic violence cases involving children.

The initial goals of the Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project were to protect children, to stop the violence, to protect abused parties, to hold perpetrators accountable for their violent behavior and for stopping the behavior, to rehabilitate perpetrators, and to convey that domestic violence cannot be tolerated.

The Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project's protocols are meant to serve both the petitioners and respondents in civil restraining order filings in the Orange County Superior Court. To be eligible for the services provided by this pilot project, families must meet four criteria: (1) children must be present in the family; (2) domestic violence must be alleged; (3) there must not be a paternity or dissolution action pending; and (4) there cannot be a police investigation in process or a matter pending in criminal court that relates to any violent act. These criteria were developed to limit the provision of services to those who file restraining order petitions under the Domestic Violence Protection Act.

Collaboration, Consultation, and Research

Jan A. Shaw, Director of Orange County Superior Court's Mediation and Investigative Services, requested in mid-October 1997 that the Statewide Office of Family Court Services provide program development consultation and technical assistance to facilitate the effective and successful implementation of the Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project. Ms. Shaw's request, which was supported by Supervising Family Law Judge Jonathan H. Cannon, initiated an ongoing collaborative effort between Mediation and Investigative Services, the Orange County Superior Court, and the Statewide Office of Family Court Services.

Susan E. Hanks, Ph.D., Coordinator for Special Services at the Statewide Office of Family Court Services, has provided consultation to this project in the areas of research design, staff and community education, and program development regarding domestic violence prevention and intervention services. Mitchell Yee, Research Analyst at the Statewide Office of Family Court Services, has provided technical assistance in the areas of data collection, coding, and analysis. This preliminary descriptive report of the families seen in the Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project is a result of this collaboration.

The nature and extent of domestic violence identified in this preliminary study both mirror and elaborate in greater specificity the severity of the domestic violence described in the 1993 and 1996 Statewide Office of Family Court Services' studies of domestic violence cases in California family courts. This preliminary study underscores the alarming nature and extent of domestic violence to which an estimated 50,000 children whose parents seek the intervention of California family courts are exposed each year.

Collaborative Research Methodology

The findings in this preliminary report are based on a targeted random sampling of over 400 case files of families who were provided services through the Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project since its inception in mid-August through the end of November 1997. Thirty-eight cases files, approximately every tenth file from the more than 400 files available, were selected for inclusion in this study. Quantitative descriptive data from these files were used to create the statistical database. Written declarations contained in the restraining order petitions and reports written for the court by the domestic violence prevention specialists provided qualitative narrative data.

Case files were reviewed for content, consistency, and integrity and were found to be in excellent condition. The Mediation and Investigative Services staff were thorough and complete in constructing the files that have served as the basis for this review.

A typical case file contained copies of the following documents:

- Intake form;
- Temporary restraining order application with declarations;
- Department of Motor Vehicles reports on petitioner and respondent;
- Police incident reports;
- Social Services reports (child abuse reports);
- Domestic Violence Prevention Services specialists' report summarizing the interviews with the petitioner, respondent, and their children (if interviewed) and describing any pertinent collateral information gathered, as well as the specialists' summary regarding any external corroboration of the domestic violence allegations.

Study Limitations

The case files that are the source of data used in this study consist of materials created by a variety of people including the petitioners, the respondents, the Domestic Violence Prevention Services assistant, the Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project specialists, and judicial officers. Of course, the original purpose of a case file is not to produce data for a rigorous statistical study, but instead to form a legal record. Therefore, some interpretations of the data were necessary. In addition, the veracity of some of the data items used cannot be substantiated but were included for completeness. Although due care was used in evaluating the case file and generating the data, any statistics reported should be considered descriptive only.

Description of the Families

The Children

A total of 84 boys and girls ranging in age from 1 month to 20 years old were covered in the 38 reviewed restraining order petitions. The median age of this group was about six and a half years, although one-fourth of the children were two years and nine months or younger. Fifty-two percent of the children were boys and 48 percent were girls. Eighty percent of the 38 mothers/petitioners indicated their children's ethnicity: 43 percent reported 'White,' 19 percent reported 'Hispanic,' 10 percent reported 'Asian,' and 10 percent reported 'Mixed.' It is important to recognize that all of the 84 boys and girls in these 38 families, as well as their unreported step-siblings, are what is termed in the research literature as "children exposed to domestic violence."

Extrapolating from these data we can assume that approximately 840 boys and girls, at an average age of six and a half years, were in the over 400 families that received services through the Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project during the three-month period from August 15 through November 30, 1997. It should be noted that this figure does not

include the other children who were also likely to be in these families but who are not biologically related to both parties, and, as such, may not be known to the court. Both sets of children were exposed to domestic violence of the type and severity described below.

Parental Relationship

Thirteen(34 percent) of the 38 mother-father pairs were never married. Four(about 10 percent) of these parental pairs described themselves as having never resided together. Fourteen (37 percent) of the mothers/petitioners indicated that a prior restraining order existed. Thirty-four (90 percent) of the cases in this sample were in pro per.

Petitioners/Mothers

Petitioners in these temporary restraining order(TRO)filings are individuals seeking protection from alleged domestic violence. In 36 (95 percent) of the TROs covered in this report, a mother alleging domestic violence was the petitioner, and the father of the children in this study was the respondent. The mothers/petitioners ranged from 18 to 48 years of age; 33 years was the average age.

Respondents/Fathers

Respondents are individuals who are alleged to have been violent toward the petitioners. The children's father was the respondent in 35 (95 percent)of the 38 filings covered in this report. Five(16 percent) of the respondents/fathers acknowledged that they had perpetrated the alleged abuse.

The average age of the fathers/respondents was also 33 years; they ranged from 19 to 53 years of age. Forty-two percent of the respondents/fathers were reported by the petitioners/mothers to have had

some level of prior involvement with the court system. (However, this category is broad and could include offenses ranging from moving traffic violations to domestic violence.)

Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project Process

Ex parte Hearing

As 90 percent of the petitioners/mothers are pro pers, prior to their Temporary Restraining Order hearing, they typically seek the services of the Domestic Violence Assistance Program, a nonprofit victim support service located at the courthouse. The Domestic Violence Assistance Program helps petitioners prepare their documents for a temporary restraining order before the initial court hearing, at which the TRO petition may either be granted or denied. Of the 38 cases reviewed in this preliminary study, only one petition for a TRO was denied by the court at the ex parte court hearing.

Initial Screening

Regardless of whether the temporary restraining order is granted by the court, an Order to Show Cause (OSC) hearing is set by the court for up to 21 days later. Petitioners and, in some cases, respondents then attend separate screening meetings with the Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project assistant, a member of the staff of Orange County's Mediation and Investigative Services. Usually, this 15-to-30-minute screening immediately follows the court's signing of the temporary restraining order. The Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project assistant gathers pertinent information on the history of the parties' relationship; the nature and history of the alleged abuse; and the criminal, medical, drug-alcohol, and psychological history of both the petitioner and the respondent.

Child abuse was often reported by parents during the initial screening. In an effort to protect children from the consequences of family violence, a Child Abuse Report (CAR) was filed with Children's Protective Services in 20 (52 percent) of the 38 cases. Child abuse allegations were substantiated by Children's Protective Services investigation in 9 (over 45 percent) of the 20 reported cases. Children's Protective Services found 3 (15 percent) of the 20 reported cases to be unsubstantiated.

Domestic Violence Prevention Specialist's Investigation

Separate follow-up appointments are scheduled for the petitioner, the respondent, and, in some cases, their children over the age of five, with a Domestic Violence Prevention Services specialist who is on the staff of Orange County's Mediation and Investigative Services. The domestic violence prevention specialist focuses his or her investigation on issues of violence, gathering specific information regarding the allegations of domestic violence in the petitioner's TRO declaration. The Domestic Violence Prevention Services specialist summarizes the findings of this investigation in a report, including recommendations, which is filed with the court prior to the Order to Show Cause hearing. The Domestic Violence Prevention Services specialists' reports may include recommendations concerning legal custody, physical custody, no parental contact and supervised visitation, drug or alcohol testing and treatment, batterer's treatment, counseling for children, counseling for victims, and parenting education classes. It is not known which of the Domestic Violence Prevention Services specialists' recommendations are later followed by the court at the Order to Show Cause hearing.

Outcome of Investigation

Of those cases referred to the Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project from the ex parte hearing, nine (24 percent) of the 38

cases were deemed ineligible for project services because of the presence of a concurrent dissolution petition, a concurrent filing of a restraining order in criminal court (by California statute, criminal court restraining orders supersede those from civil court), pending criminal charges, or a case filed in juvenile dependency court. Twenty-nine cases (76 percent) were deemed to be eligible for services through the Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project. These cases proceeded to the Order to Show Cause hearing.

Order to Show Cause Hearing

At the Order to Show Cause hearing, the court may consider the domestic violence prevention specialist's report and may either grant or deny the issuance of a permanent restraining order. The "stay away" directive of the restraining order will remain in effect for up to three years. If an order is granted, it includes a child custody and access order (often requiring supervised visitation for the respondent). This aspect of the order may continue indefinitely or until it is later modified. The court may also issue additional orders, ordering the respondents/fathers to batterers treatment programs or the petitioners/mothers to counseling. Either party may be ordered to attend parenting classes and drug and alcohol treatment.

TROs Granted. TRO applications in 23 (79 percent) of the 29 eligible cases that were referred to the Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project for investigation were granted at the Order to Show Cause hearing. One of the 29 eligible cases was dismissed because of insufficient evidence. Five (17 percent) of the 29 eligible cases were ordered off the court calendar because the parties either failed to appear for the hearing or had reconciled.

In 22 of the 23 eligible cases in which a TRO lasting up to three years was granted at the Order to Show Cause hearing, the mother was the

petitioner and the father was the respondent. The father was the petitioner and the mother was the respondent in one of the 23 eligible cases.

Child Custody Orders. Sole legal and physical custody was granted to the mothers/petitioners in 20 cases, to the father/petitioner in 1 cases, and to a grandparent in 1 case. Joint legal and physical custody was granted in 1 case.

Visitation Orders. Twenty of the fathers/respondents were ordered to have either supervised visitation or no visitation. Supervised visitation was ordered for the one mother who was a respondent. Both parents were ordered to have supervised visitation in the one case in which the grandparent was granted sole legal and physical custody. No-visitation orders were specified in only 1 of the 23 cases.

Substantiation of Allegations. The allegations of abuse investigated by the domestic violence prevention specialists were substantiated when either the respondents/fathers acknowledged the abuse or the domestic violence prevention specialists gathered external corroborating data that confirmed the abuse allegations. Six (21 percent) of the 28 fathers/respondents acknowledged the abuse. Twenty-one (75 percent) of the 28 fathers/respondents denied it. The response of the remaining 2 respondents could not be determined.

Compliance Hearings. Compliance hearings are scheduled to take place at 10-week and 38-week intervals following the Order to Show Cause hearing. Petitioners and respondents are required to show proof of compliance with the court's orders. Either party not complying with the court's orders may be held in contempt of court and may be sent to jail for failure to comply. In addition, Supervising Family Law Judge Jonathan H. Cannon has stated that an attorney may be appointed at this time to represent the children's interests if either party fails to comply with the court's orders. It was too early in the pilot project's

implementation phase to include data regarding the outcome of compliance hearings in this preliminary report.

Children's Exposure to Domestic Violence

Reports by the mothers and fathers of these 84 children paint a picture of the type, severity, and frequency of the family violence to which these children were exposed. Reports by the mothers also indicate that some children were not simply passive bystanders during violent episodes but had also actively intervened.

These are important findings because witnessing or being present during episodes of violence is known to cause both short- and long-terms psychological trauma in children. Exposure to domestic violence during childhood has been identified as the highest risk factor in the childhood histories of adult male batterers (Hotaling & Sugarman, 1987). Active participation or intervention by children in episodes of domestic violence increases the level of psychological trauma that they experience. Children who actively intervene in violent parental interactions also are at risk for direct physical injury and abuse (Eth & Pynoos, 1985; Jaffe, 1995).

Children's Witnessing of and Intervention in Domestic Violence

Thirty-seven(97 percent)of the 38 petitioners/mothers reported that the children in this study were present during an incident of violence. Fifteen(40 percent)of the 38 mothers reported that their children had attempted to intervene in episodes of physical violence. In other words, the mothers of 34 (40 percent)of the boys and girls (whose average age is six and one-half years) reported that the children had attempted to intervene in the fathers' violence directed against their mothers.

Types and Severity of Domestic Violence to Which Children Were Exposed

Abuse scores were derived from data reported in the petitioners/mothers' restraining order declarations or recorded by the domestic violence screener during the initial screening interviews. Data were analyzed along two dimension: (1)types of abuse, including subcategorizes of physical abuse, sexual abuse, psychological abuse, and destruction of property and pets; and (2) overall severity of violence for this group of 38 families as an aggregate.

Types of Abuse

A Physical Abuse Score was constructed from a group of 10 violent behaviors listed on the intake form that was completed by the mother/petitioner. These 10 behaviors included pushing, shaking, slapping, kicking, choking, spitting, punching, biting, restraining, and assaulting with a weapon. Mothers/petitioners were asked to indicate the kinds of physically violent behaviors they had experienced. Thirty-five (92 percent)of the mothers/petitioners experienced from 1 to 10 different types of physical violence. Twenty (52 percent)of the mothers/petitioners reported that they had experienced at least 5 or more types of physical violence.

A Sexual Abuse Score was constructed from two sexually abusive behaviors listed on the intake form. These behaviors included forced sex and sex in the presence of the children. Mothers/petitioners were asked to indicate the kind of sexually abusive behaviors they had experienced. Fourteen (37 percent)of the 38 mothers reported that they had experienced one or both types of sexual assault.

A Psychological Abuse Score was constructed from a group of seven behaviors listed on the intake form completed by the mother/petitioner. These psychologically abusive behaviors included threats of assault, threats of suicide, extreme jealousy, isolation, threats to kidnap the

children, threats to kill pets, and stalking. Thirty-five (92 percent) of the 38 mothers/petitioners reported having experienced one or more forms of psychological abuse.

A Destruction of Property/Pet Score was constructed from a group of four violent behaviors listed on the intake form. These behaviors included making holes in walls or doors, destroying objects, killing a pet, and setting fire to property. Thirty-one (82 percent) of the 38 mothers/petitioners reported having experienced one or more forms of property destruction and pet abuse.

Overall, the violence described in this group of 38 families in the Orange County Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project consisted of multiple types of severe violence.

Severity of Violence Score

A Severity of Violence Score was constructed for the entire sample by totaling the number of individual abusive behaviors in each of the four types listed above. There were a total of 23 different abusive behaviors. The Severity of Violence Score was calculated by totaling all of the indicated violent behaviors per family and dividing by 23 (the total number of possible violent behaviors).

The 38 families in this group were heavily infused with violence. The average number of abusive behaviors reported was 10 out of a possible 23. The top one-fourth of families reported at least 14 out of a possible 23 abusive behaviors.

Eleven (29 percent) of the 38 mothers/petitioners reported that fathers/respondents had used weapons during episodes of domestic violence. Use of weapons (together with verbal threats to kill and the use of drugs and alcohol) heightens the potential for lethality in domestic violence cases.

In 36 (95 percent) of the 38 families, mothers/petitioners also reported that police had responded to an incident of domestic violence at least once. Calls to 911 during an incident of violence had occurred in 27 (71 percent) of the 38 families.

What Children Saw and Heard

The following excerpts are from the declarations of the petitioners/mothers written in response to the questions on the TRO declaration asking the petitioner to "describe in detail the most recent incidents of abuse. Describe any injuries. Describe any history of abuse." These excerpts are a vivid portrayal of the frequency, the varied types, and the degree of severity of the violence that children, whose average age is six and one-half years, have seen, heard, and, in some incidents, intervened in. These qualitative, narrative descriptions parallel the severity reflected in the domestic abuse scores described previously. The texts have been altered only to identify the petitioner's or respondent's relationship, that is, mother or father, to the child.

Excerpts:

- Father broke the garage door with a hammer in order to steal mother's car;
- Father stole mother's jewelry and sold it;
- Father brought a moving van to the home to remove all the of the family's possessions;
- Father pulled phone from wall;
- Father pushed mother and pulled off all her clothing;
- Father threatened, "If I couldn't have you [mother], nobody can."
- Father verbally threatened to kill mother;
- Father pulled off all mother's clothing and forced sex;
- Father had been thrown in jail for assaulting mother and had pushed her, spit on her, sexually assaulted her....Father has been taken out of the home [by the police] "too many times to remember".... Father had caused mother to lose baby-sitters because he scared them with his violence;
- Father scratched mother's arm, forced mother to kiss him, and was blocking the door so mother could not get by....Father pushed the three-year-old and yelled at the five-year-old to make them cry;

- Father hit mother on the head for being "stupid."...Father stated that since mother had acted stupid, the children would be punished... children were forced to stay awake until 3 a.m.;
- Father smacked three-year-old daughter on the head. Father kicked and hit 13-year-old son all over his body;
- Father threatened to kill mother in front of the children....Father made mother sit on couch in front of three children...Told mother he wanted to make her "suffer like he had" and indicated what a terrible spouse she was. He stated he'd like to kill mother with three shots...the first one in the leg, the second one in the other leg...let mother suffer for a while, and the third shot to the chest. Father threw a cigarette at mother with the two-year-old in her lap. Father picked up plate to hit mother over the head....The police arrived....daughter [aged 12 years] states that she "can't stop thinking about father's threats of killing mother...."no matter how hard I try, the threat won't leave my head."...Mother reports daughter "is very concerned about sleeping near the window and woke up several times during the night."...Father, in this case, had acknowledged that he threatened to kill mother in front of the children;
- Father hit mother with a 2 x 4 across the head...threatened to kill mother;
- Father slammed mother up against the car;
- Father told mother she could leave but not take the three-month-old with her...hit son with a bar across the face...grabbed three month old and threw her against the wall;
- Father punched four-year-old son several times in the face...threw him against the wall;
- Mother moved several times to protect herself and the children but father followed them wherever they moved and began to threaten and harass them. Father tells mother that they have a daughter together so he will never leave her alone. Mother filed an order in 1992 and father left her alone for the duration of the order. Now that it has expired, mother needs another restraining order to keep father away;
- Father put his fist through door and wall...pushed mother out of the way in the kitchen and bedroom...shoved his fist in son's chest... Son loves his dad but is afraid for good cause...daughter is afraid of what Dad might do to mom;
- Mother is "terrified of him and just his voice...No more, it has to stop!";
- Father threatens mother that if she ever leaves she won't get to take the kids away because he'll "hunt her down like a dog." Mother tried to leave, but when she did her daughter was in her arms and father grabbed her from mother. So mother stopped....Children shouldn't see this...It's wrong;
- There has been violence before when mother ignored father in a fight so mother won't say anything she will be sorry for...Mother went for the phone to call the police and father threw a skillet of hot gravy across the room....He's put his fist through the wall next to mother's face...getting two inches from her face and yelling at her and calling her names;
- While mother was driving on the freeway, father pulled mother's hair. Said he was going to take the steering wheel and drive into the wall to kill both of them....Father said he wanted to cut mother's throat. He said he would kill her in front of the children...it didn't matter if they were watching....He said he talked to his girlfriend about

getting a gun, and if mother didn't follow his orders he was going to use it....Throughout the entire drive home, father screamed at mother, hit the dashboard, broke the mirror, pulled her hair repeatedly....Mother was absolutely terrified of him...He makes threats that he wants to knock mother's teeth out, break her face; he says mother makes his life hell and it makes him sick to look at her....He says he doesn't care whether the children are present or not....Mother is afraid he will carry out the threats he has made;

- The verbal abuse includes calling mother and the daughters "bitches," "stupid bitch;" calling them ignorant, useless; constant nagging; announcing their faults or mistakes as to embarrass them in the neighborhood; calling the boys stupid, sissies....Father also discounts their feelings, calls them liars, when they try to tell father he hurt them or embarrasses them; father says they are just trying to get him in trouble, that it is all in their heads, that they are "unstable"....Anything father can do to constantly make them feel that they are losers or lesser than himself....There is no encouragement or recognition of effort made by other members in the household, and the environment is very stressed and the spirits of the other family members are constantly being broken down. The daughters and mother suffer bouts of depression from father's treatment....The 10-year-old boys are confused;
- Father kicked the surface of mother's inner thighs which were bruised for about a week and a half....Father invited himself into the apartment, asked to use the restroom, and refused to leave...Father asked to stay;...When mother said no, father became hysterical and pinned mother down saying, "I'm going to hold you hostage until you lose your job; the only way I'll leave is if you call the police. Someone is going to have to keep me away from you"....Father later locked mother in the bedroom closet, shutting off all the lights in the house, and father left mother there for about an hour. Father kicked mother and told mother she wasn't going to win....Mother is "in fear of [her]life and safety."...Mother was in the home getting some clothes to spend the night elsewhere....As mother went to turn off the last light in the house, father came out of nowhere (she had checked every room in the house) and father grabbed mother....He cut mother's hair with a knife, hit and kicked mother, mother ran....Father grabbed her and beat mother's head on the car....Mother played dead....Father finally left, leaving the knife behind as evidence. Father not only attacked mother but tried to get daughters with the knife but neighbors took [daughters] in....Mother is still afraid for her life because father said to her while she was playing dead on the ground..."I'm going to go to jail for you."...Mother thinks father will try to finish the job.

Violence in the Lives of Children

The types, severity, nature, and extent of domestic violence described above were frequently reported by the families who seek the services of Orange County's Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project. This preliminary study only briefly outlines the experiences of these children and their mothers and fathers. However, violence in the families profiled here is typical of the terrorizing emotional climate

and tragic reality in the everyday lives of children traumatized by domestically violent families.

The Orange County's Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project has provided a unique opportunity for further in-depth study of this issue and of one court-based approach to intervention. Given the complexities, conundrums, and risks in the field of domestic violence intervention and prevention, this pilot project presents a unique opportunity to further understand and creatively address a number of crucial issues related to structuring appropriate, effective, and coordinated court responses to domestic violence. It is hoped that this preliminary report highlights the unique quality of the data that is potentially available through this project and the unique opportunity available in the family court setting for intervening in the lives of traumatized and (at times) endangered children who are exposed to domestic violence. The findings of this preliminary study clearly support the addition of another goal to those already outlined in the Domestic Violence Prevention Services Project -- that is, to educate parents about the detrimental, traumatic impact of exposure to domestic violence on their children.

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